

Town of Forked River
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and
County Road 614
Forked River
Ocean County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1023

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF FORKED RIVER

HABS No. NJ-1023

Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and County Road 614, Forked River, Ocean County, New Jersey.

Significance: Forked River was established in the mid-eighteenth century and is representative of the typical bay town, often referred to as the "Barnegat Bay resorts." The villages fronting the bay were established communities relying on the products of forest trade and sea long before the railroad brought resort trade. Forked River rivaled neighboring Waretown and Barnegat for the title of best fishing and gunning grounds, as well as supported various industries, including saltworks, sawmills, iron production, game farms, charcoal production and mercantile trade.

History: Considered by some the fishing headquarters for Barnegat Bay, fisherman who visited the Forked River area throughout the summer marveled over the large numbers of wreckfish, sheepshead and kingfish, while the gunners arriving in the winter and spring expected a plentiful supply of teal, broad-bills, blacks, red-heads and other birds. The quail, rabbits, coons and foxes frequenting the woods were also fair game. According to Kobbe, this preference for Forked River was based on the town's hotel, the Lafayette House, located on the north branch of the Forked River. Not only did the Lafayette offer a plentiful supply of food at early hours, but also quick, efficient stage transportation directly from boat to hotel.¹ Of the three hotels that once stood on the main stage line, only the Olde Forked River House remains. According to tradition, Captain Joshua Huddy stopped at the inn on his way through the area. Since enlarged to include five dining rooms, the popular restaurant still attracts motorists heading towards Long Beach Island.

Though the bay provided the primary means of subsistence for early settlers, and of recreation for later tourists, other natural resources influenced the town's initial urban development. The Forked River supported various industries, such as, Samuel Warden's saltworks, established near the Forked River port in 1743. The river also powered numerous nineteenth century sawmills such as the Joseph Holmes Mill, once operating between Mill and Parker Streets on the north branch of the fork. Houses were built along the river and near Mill Pond. In 1810, John Lacey completed a \$10,000.00 road that ran parallel to the river and connected his iron works in Bamber with the docks. Lacey, the revolutionary war general for whom Lacey township was named, supervised "a forge with four fires, tow hammers, stamping mill, etc., and eight good dwelling houses."² Today, Lacey Drive bypasses the town's commercial district, crossing Route 9 close to the state game farm.

¹ Gustav Kobbe, The New Jersey Coast and Pines (Short Hills: By the author, 1889; reprint, Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1977), 66-68.

² Charles Boyer, Early Forges and Furnaces in New Jersey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), 68.

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When iron production was at its height, the state game farm was known as the Woodmansee estate and contained two eighteenth century houses, a vernacular colonial farmhouse and a two and one-half story Federal style home. There was also an assortment of nineteenth and twentieth century sheds with pheasant weather vanes, indicative of the estate's conversion into a game farm in 1912. A 1970 newspaper article reported that over 10,000 people annually visited the 35,000 ring-necked pheasants produced each year.³ Today, the birds are cared for by juvenile offenders who live on the property.

A variety of other industries were practiced in the early days of Forked River as well. For fifty years, beginning in 1825, Captain David Stout Parker ran a local store and sailed ships loaded with pine lumber to New York. With the proceeds from his mercantile trade, he purchased the "Greenwood tract" of land, where he produced charcoal for inland markets. Parker was also instrumental in extending the railroad from Toms River to Waretown. Though the lumber and charcoal resources were depleted by the 1860s, Forked River's tourist trade increased during the second half of the century. Captain Parker's brother, Joseph "Old Sheriff" Parker established the Lafayette House in 1857.⁴

By 1895, Forked River was the largest city in the township with a population of about 500. Though it boasted "Methodist and Presbyterian churches, a Universalist Church Society, a graded public school and a lodge of the Knights of the Golden Eagle," the town was most famous for its salt water fishing and cat yachts.⁵ Since the construction of the first nuclear power plant in New Jersey, the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating station outside Forked River, area residents have been even more concerned with water. The 1969 power plant brought the increased residential and commercial development of Routes 9 and 72, the death of fish and the threat of nuclear disaster.⁶

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³ The Ocean County Sun (Aug. 20, 1970.. Collection of the Ocean County Historical Society, Toms River).

⁴ H.C. Woolman and T.F. Rose, Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast (Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985), 90-92.

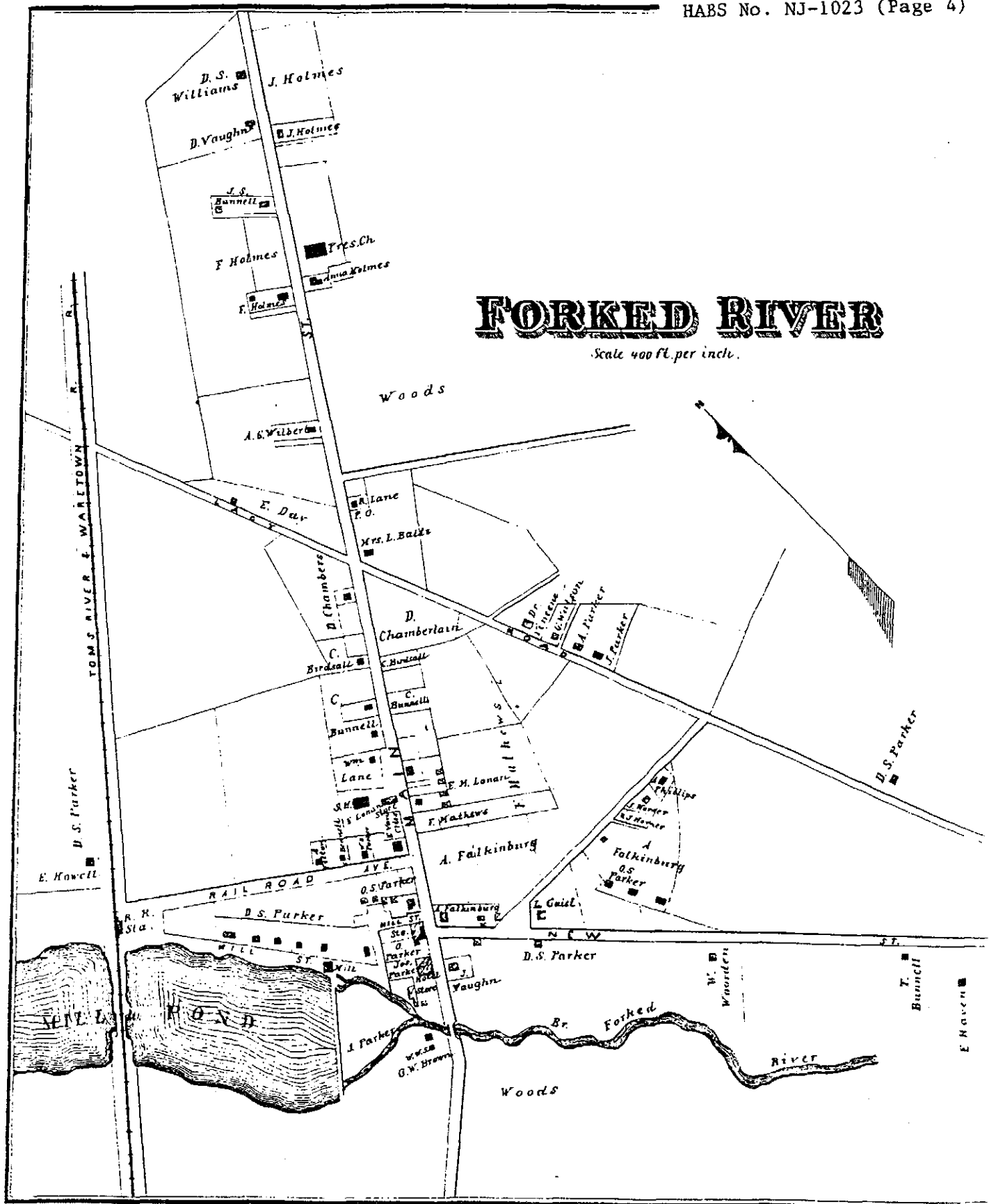
⁵ William Fischer, Biographical Cyclopaedia of Ocean County (Philadelphia: A.D. Smith and Co., 1899), 231-32.

⁶ "Ocean County Historical Sites Survey, Lacey Township" (Toms River: Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981), 4-5.

- Sources:
- Boyer, Charles. Early Forges and Furnaces in New Jersey. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931.
- Fischer, William. Biographical Cyclopaedia of Ocean County. Philadelphia: A.D. Smith and Co., 1899.
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- "Ocean County Historic Sites Survey, Lacey Township." Toms River: Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981.
- Ocean County Sun, Aug. 20, 1970, n.p. Collection of the Ocean County Historical Society, Toms River.
- Woolman, H.C. and T.F. Rose. Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast. Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985.

Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatza (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.



H.C. Woolman and T.F. Rose, Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast (Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985), 295.